

Relapse Prevention Handbook 2020

Created by GDAS
Treatment Workers



GWENT DRUG AND
ALCOHOL SERVICE

Relapse Prevention Handbook

01 - Alcohol and its effects

High Risk Situations

Avoid friends/family who may use alcohol/drugs to excess

Develop a positive support network

Manage cravings and adopt coping strategies

Practice good self-care

Additional Resources



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The effects of Alcohol

Alcohol can make us feel good. A couple of drinks can help us to relax, put us in a good mood, feel more energetic & confident, it can help us to forget about our worries and stresses and feel happier. But alcohol is a depressant drug so these benefits are only temporary if we keep drinking.

What are the downsides?

- Health risks – cirrhosis of the liver, increased risks of liver/ oral cancers and heart disease,
- Effect sleep patterns
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Dehydration which can cause brain damage
- Lower your fight and flight function
- Alcohol overdose
- Impact on social life and relationships
- Guilt
- Increase anxiety and depression
- Low mood
- Increase aggressive tendencies
- Increase suicidal thoughts
- Increase other drug taking

What happens when someone is dependent on alcohol?

Alcohol dependence, is the most serious form of drinking problem and describes a strong, often uncontrollable, desire to drink. Drinking plays an important part in the day to day life of alcohol dependent people, which could lead to building up a physical tolerance or experiencing withdrawal symptoms if they stop. Someone could also be becoming dependent on alcohol if they find it very difficult to enjoy yourself or relax without having a drink, you could have become psychologically dependent on alcohol.

Physical symptoms of withdrawal

Hand tremors
Shakes
Sweating
Nausea
Seizures
Visual hallucinations
Death

Psychological symptoms of withdrawal

Depression
Anxiety
Irritability
Insomnia
Restlessness
Paranoia

Other effects of alcohol

Slurred speech
Headaches
Confusion
Drowsiness
Vomiting
Diarrhoea
General feeling of unwell

Physical and Mental Health

- High blood pressure, heart problems, risk of stroke
- Cancers of the stomach, breast, throat, mouth
- Liver disease, liver cancer
- Infertility, erectile dysfunction
- Memory loss
- Depression, anxiety, suicidal thinking
- Weight gain, malnutrition
- Digestive issues
- Organ damage

Drink Driving

- 0.35 over the limit
- If you are caught driving under the influence the consequences are serious, you can get:
- Imprisoned
- Banned from driving
- A fine which can be unlimited
- Cause harm and even death to innocent individuals
- Lose employment, family and friends



Alcohol affects every area of ourselves as individuals and the rest of our lives. When someone develops a problem with alcohol it becomes their priority above all else. This could be to the detriment of their mental or physical health, their job, their families and the enjoyment they find in life normally.

Alcohol and our appearance

- Face can look bloated and puffy
- Stomach appear bloated
- Dehydrates your skin – increase wrinkles
- Increases acne prone skin
- Bloodshot eyes
- The body attempts to empty the alcohol out of your body through the process of sweating, urine and through your breath
- Increases weight gain

Alcohol and sleep

- Although we may fall asleep faster, it disrupts the amount of time you have in REM sleep, REM sleep benefits your body by improving mood, memories and learning. Not getting enough REM sleep may cause detrimental effects to your physical and emotional health.
- Reduces individuals coping strategies to help deal with threatening situations
- Increases visits to the bathroom and snoring

Harm Reduction

Thiamine



Alcohol can cause brain damage. This can be due to deficiencies in Thiamine which is a form of B1 Vitamin to help protect your brain. We normally get B1 through our diets but people tend to have poorer diets when they are drinking more. Taking Thiamine means our brains can stay better protected from the effects of alcohol

Reduction Planning



If you are physically dependent a slow, gradual reduction is the safest way to make changes. Work on a 10% reduction per week. So if you drink 10 cans, only drink 9 and see how you feel before reducing more

Tips for reducing



Use drinks cups to help you measure how much to drink
Taller glasses

Add in mixers, for example fizzy drinks or juices

Alternate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks

Don't keep the bottle next to you, we drink more slowly when we keep having to get up to refill

Buy smaller amounts of alcohol or lower percentage alcohol. For example switching from spirits to cider or from a high strength to a lower strength lager

Alcohol Overdose

We used to call it alcohol poisoning but drinking too much alcohol can cause overdose just like taking too much of other drugs.

Alcohol is a depressant that affects your central nervous system, it slows down your speech, movement and reaction time. An overdose occurs when you consume too much alcohol and your body is unable to break it down safely.

The body will try to warn us that we're drinking too much; we'll have trouble with our coordination, we'll vomit, we'll have blackouts and then eventually we'll lose consciousness. Overdose can lead to seizures, cardiac arrest and death.



Common Risk Factors

- Age
- Gender – men are at a higher risk
- Body size – weight, height determines how fast alcohol is absorbed in your body
- Tolerance – having a high tolerance or drinking too quickly
- Binge drinking – consuming more than 5 drinks within an hour
- Drug use – mixing alcohol and drugs can cause serious complications
- Health conditions – such as diabetes can put you at an increased risk of overdose



Signs of overdose

- Individual cannot be aroused (awaken)
- Mental confusion
- Vomiting
- Seizures
- Slow breathing – fewer than 8 breaths per minute
- Hypothermia – low body temperature – bluish and paleness in skin colour

High Risk Situations

Any situation or event that poses a threat to your recovery is considered a high-risk situation. High-risk situations can either be related to your emotional state or it can be a consequence of your external surroundings.

Examples of High Risk Situations:

- Drinking/using for more confidence
- Confrontation/Arguments
- Low Self Esteem
- Boredom
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Pain – mental and/or physical
- Saying no to alcohol/drugs in a social setting
- Peer Pressure – being encouraged to drink or use
- Trauma or Difficulties in Childhood (Intrusive Memories)
- I enjoy drinking alcohol or using– fun !
- Need to relax or switch off – mentally and physically

What are my High Risk Situations?

Give some examples below about what your High Risk Situations might be.

How can I manage them?

On this side write down some ideas about how you could manage each situation you identified

What are the benefits of changing?

Remembering why we're making changes can help in tough times, what are your reasons? This could be better relationships, better health, feeling better emotionally or just having more money in your pocket.



Cravings

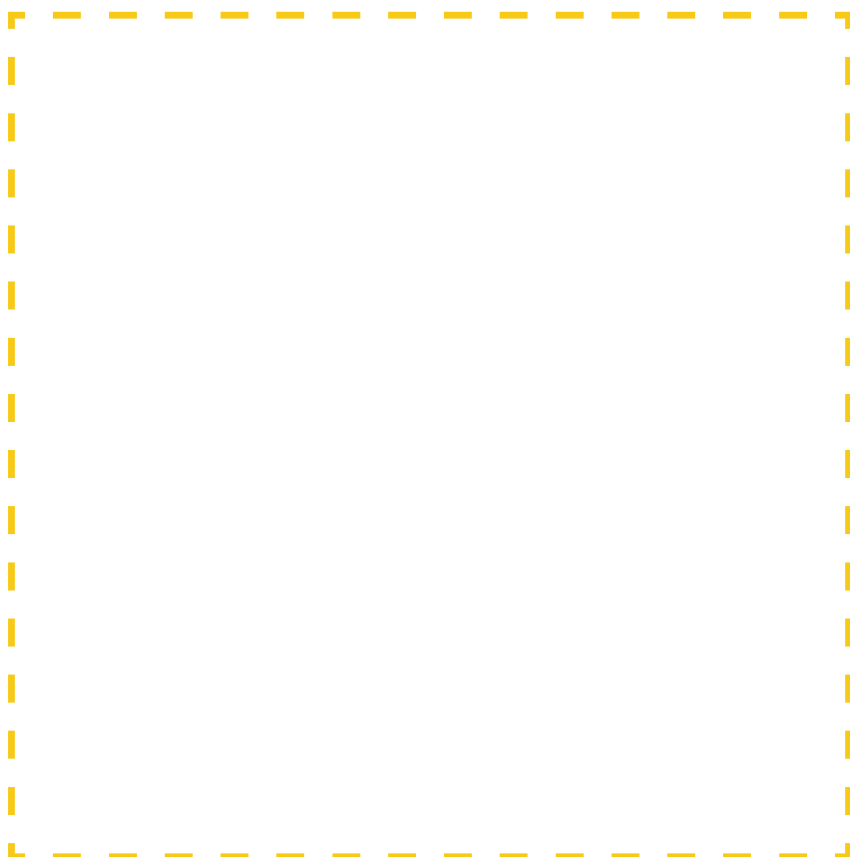
- Are a normal part of recovering from an addiction – If you can manage the craving you will re-train your brain and cravings will fade eventually.
- Can be uncomfortable and may last no more than 10 minutes – the more you manage a craving, the easier it gets over time.
- Use distraction techniques or new behaviours to combat cravings and eventually the new behaviours will become the norm.
- Giving in to cravings prolongs their presence in your life – not giving in to cravings and thinking about consequences from using helps speed up Recovery.
- When a craving happens – keep your reasons for stopping close and read them over again.

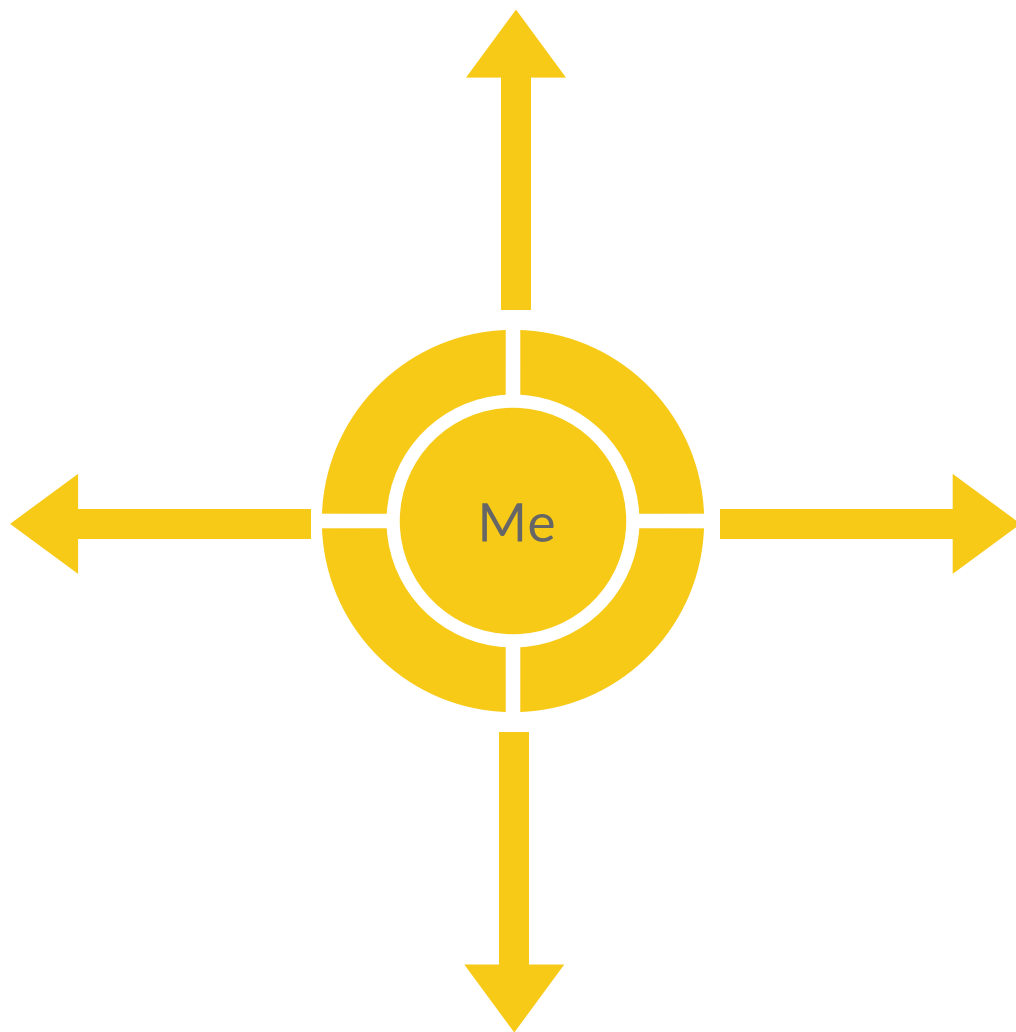
Ways to manage cravings

- Finding new ways to relax
- Using your time to do meaningful activities
- Walking
- Jogging
- Reading
- Listening to music
- Relaxation techniques
- Breathing exercises
- Talking to someone who will listen and help
- Your favourite songs on a playlist
- Mindfulness
- Meditation
- Swimming
- Yoga
- Sitting in nature/garden
- Finding an interesting hobby

How can you manage your cravings?

Everyone is different and it is important that ways to manage cravings work for you. Write down some ways that you can try to manage cravings when they occur.





Support Networks

We don't have to make changes alone, getting support from other people can help us to reach our goals. Who is in your network? Use this page to map out who can help you.

What am I grateful for?

When things are tough it can be hard to remember the good things we have. Write down all the things you are grateful for in your life.

Sometimes when we can't sleep it can also help to do an A-Z in our head of things we're grateful for to help our minds focus on good things.

A large dashed yellow rectangular box, intended for writing a list of things one is grateful for. The box is empty and occupies the lower two-thirds of the page.

Making emotional well-being a priority.

- Make time to do things that you love.
- Break habits of negative self-talk and thinking patterns.
- As much as possible, avoid people who are consistently negative.
- Be mindful of the things that you allow to influence your life. (Music, movies, books, etc.)

Making sobriety a non-negotiable priority.

- Apply things that you have learned in treatment to your everyday life.
- Do not go to places and events that are focused on substance abuse.
- Do not allow the fear of offending someone to compromise your sobriety.
- Keep reminding yourself why you're doing this



Self-care is any activity that we do deliberately in order to take care of our mental, emotional, and physical health. Although it's a simple concept in theory, it's something we very often overlook.

PsychCentral.com

Making physical health a priority.

- Get an adequate amount of sleep each night.
- Eat an overall healthy diet in order to feel your best.
- Exercise regularly; it is a great way to handle and reduce stress.
- Seek medical care when needed and take care of yourself. If you don't then no one else will.

Making mental health a priority.

- Make regular time to take care of yourself
- Be kind to yourself when things are going well and not so well
- Reward yourself for doing well (not with alcohol/drugs)
- Keep a gratitude list - everything you're grateful for (you can do this on the next page)

Additional Resources

Apps

Sobriety counter

Quit drinking – stay sober

I am sober

Sobriety Quotes

Books

The Naked Mind – Annie Grace

The Unexpected Joy of Being Sober – Catherine Gray

The Sober Survival Guide: How to Free Yourself from Alcohol

Forever – Simon Chapple

Online Resources

www.smartrecovery.org

www.nhs.uk (Alcohol Support)

www.helpguide.org

www.drinkaware.co.uk

www.alcoholchange.org.uk

www.getselfhelp.co.uk